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IRAN MUST CHANGE COURSE IN NUCLEAR STANDOFF, SAYS U.S. OFFICIAL

Nations must convince Iran's leaders to choose cooperation over confrontation

By David I. McKeeby
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – The international community must match the Iranian regime's defiant pursuit of nuclear weapons with a determined, diplomatic strategy to convince that nation's elite clerics to choose cooperation over confrontation, says Ambassador Gregory Schulte.

"Iran's leaders are determined. The rest of the world must be equally determined to defend against all aspects of the Iranian threat," Schulte said in a May 4 speech at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Schulte, the U.S. permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations' mission Vienna, Austria, said Iran has refused to comply with even a single request from the U.N. Security Council since it called on the Iranian government to suspend nuclear activities and re-establish cooperation with IAEA monitors in March.

According to the IAEA's April 28 report on Iran, Schulte said, the regime continues to enrich uranium, is proceeding with the construction of a heavy-water reactor that could supply weapons-grade material and continues to limit access of IAEA inspectors to key facilities.

CONSENSUS GROWING ABOUT IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

The IAEA report, Schulte said, also highlights several unanswered questions that severely undermine the Iranian regime's repeated claims that its nuclear program is geared solely toward the development of civilian nuclear energy.

"If the program is peaceful, why 18 years of deceit . . . why not cooperate with the IAEA . . . why the unexplained ties to the A.Q. Kahn network . . . why does Iran possess a document on fabricating nuclear weapons components . . . why the unexplained ties to Iran's military and its missile program?" Schulte asked.

The IAEA governing board's vote to refer Iran to the Security Council reflects the international community's refusal to believe Iran's claims about its nuclear programs, Schulte said. It also illustrates a growing consensus about the security threat a nuclear-armed Iran poses regionally and to the larger international community due to its documented support of terrorism.

Schulte discounted Iran's claim that it needs enriched uranium for civilian nuclear power plants, pointing out that:

- Iran's sole nuclear power plant, currently under construction in Bushehr, is already slated to receive fuel from Russia under a long-term contract;
- Other countries that generate a significant amount of electricity from nuclear energy, such as Sweden and South Korea, do not enrich uranium;
- Iranian leaders' claims that nuclear enrichment technology will allow them to attain energy self-sufficiency are spurious because its uranium reserves are quite small and the country is rich in oil and natural gas; and
- A large alternate energy source is readily available to Iran in the form of its massive reserves of natural gas, much of which currently are wasted.

"Instead of making Iran an international player," Schulte said, "the leaders of Iran are making it an international pariah" through pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Continued instability caused by the regime's "outrageous statements and defiant behavior" has had a tangible economic effect, leading major international banks,

investors and multinational corporations to reconsider doing business with Iran. Even officials from across the Iranian political spectrum have started questioning the regime's course of action, he added.

U.S. COMMITTED TO A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION

Schulte reiterated that the United States' goal "remains a diplomatic solution, one in which Iran's leaders set aside their ambitions for nuclear weapons capabilities and grasp the diplomatic opportunities offered by the world community."

He called on Iran to reconsider a plan offered in August 2005 by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany and supported by the United States and Russia. That plan would reaffirm Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy; provide assurances of fuel supplies; further Iran's desire for expanded civilian nuclear energy; offer a new political and security relationship based on cooperation; and propose new frameworks for economic and technological cooperation.

Schulte also called on nations to continue supporting international efforts to deny the Iranian government access to nuclear materials and technologies and to strengthen cooperation with Iran's neighbors.

Even though the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the United States continue to be committed to a successful diplomatic outcome in the United Nations, Schulte said they are also considering an alternate "range of targeted sanctions" in the face of continued Iranian defiance.

"For diplomacy to succeed, we must be prepared to use the full range of diplomatic tools available to the Security Council and the international community," he said.

A transcript of Schulte's speech is available on the Web site of the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Vienna, Austria:

<http://www.usun-vienna.rpo.at/>

For more information, see Arms Control and Non-Proliferation:

http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/arms_control.html

U.S., AFRICAN UNION, OTHERS WORKING HARD FOR AGREEMENT ON DARFUR

Deputy Secretary Zoellick still hard at work at peace talks in Abuja

By Charles W. Corey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Deputy Secretary of State Robert B. Zoellick and negotiators from the African Union (AU) and other members of the international community are "working hard" trying to bring the parties to agreement at the Darfur peace talks now under way in Abuja, Nigeria.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack made that point to reporters May 4 at the department's regular briefing. A variety of different issues that have been put forward by the rebel groups are now under consideration by negotiators in Abuja, McCormack said.

Zoellick and his international counterparts, he added, are now "trying to work with those ideas to see if they can bridge any of the differences between the rebel groups and the government of Sudan." "Thus far," he said, "I do not have any final announcements for you with regard to where they stand."

McCormack reminded reporters that there is a deadline on the talks of midnight May 4 Abuja time, so "at that point, the decision of what to do will be up to the AU mediators. They [the AU negotiators] are the ones who set the midnight deadline. Certainly, Secretary Zoellick is there, he is working hard. So we will see what the negotiations will produce."

Asked if Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha has returned to the Abuja talks, McCormack said "to my knowledge he is not back there."

Briefing reporters the previous day, McCormack stressed that the government of Sudan and the Sudanese rebel leaders are faced with the decision in Abuja of whether to embrace peace -- they are the ones who "hold the keys" to a solution to the crisis that grips Darfur.

He also told reporters May 3 that those involved in the talks had described the atmosphere there as one where the parties want to come to an agreement. Now it is a matter of "transferring that will, that desire into reality," the spokesman said.

DARFUR REMAINS "HIGH PRIORITY" FOR PRESIDENT, WHITE HOUSE SAYS

White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters at the May 3 White House press briefing that the "deterioration and human suffering in Darfur have been a high priority" for the president.

He told reporters that during a telephone talk with Sudanese President Umar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir, Bush urged Bashir to accept the transition of an African Union mission to a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur, to accept a NATO supportive role and to send Sudanese Vice President Taha back to the peace talks to help finalize a peace agreement.

Speaking to reporters May 3 at a press opportunity with the Japanese foreign minister in Washington, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said of the Abuja talks, "I hope the parties will take this opportunity to get a peace agreement and lay a foundation for which the violence can end and so that the people of Darfur can be safe and live in peace."

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency:
<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>

COMMISSION CITES FIVE ASIAN NATIONS FOR LACK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Burma, North Korea, China, Vietnam, Indonesia violate "universal rights"

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Five East Asian nations have been named by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for "egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief."

Burma, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), China and Vietnam were designated for 2006 as "countries of particular concern" (CPCs) in the report USCIRF submits each year to the U.S. secretary of state.

Other nations included in the 2006 list of CPCs are Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Eritrea,

Iran and Pakistan. USCIRF also placed Indonesia on its "Watch List," along with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia and Nigeria.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. The work of identifying these countries is done by the USCIRF, an independent, bipartisan U.S. government agency established under the IRFA.

The designation of CPCs not only puts a spotlight on those countries where the most severe violations take place, but also lays the groundwork for important decisions in U.S. relations with these countries.

The commission also develops a "Watch List" of countries guilty of lesser abuses of religious freedom. In these countries, conditions do not rise to the statutory level requiring CPC designation but require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments.

CHINA

The commission made its first official visit to China in 2005 and determined that the government continues to be responsible for "pervasive and severe" violations of religious freedom and related human rights. "

In the letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that accompanied the USCIRF's 2006 report, Michael Cromartie, the USCIRF chair, wrote: "Every religious community in China is subject to serious restrictions, state control, and repression. The most severe religious freedom abuses are directed against Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Roman Catholics, house church and unregistered Protestants, and spiritual groups such as the Falun Gong."

Abuses against members of these religious communities include imprisonment and torture, Cromartie wrote.

Even though the Chinese government issued a new Ordinance on Religion in March 2005, its provisions, in fact, restrict rather than protect religious freedom, offering government leaders more extensive control over all religious groups and their activities, Cromartie reported. Cromartie also noted that Beijing continues to disregard its international obligations to protect North Korean

refugees within its borders who face persecution on their return.

BURMA

Suppression of human rights and religious freedom has gone from bad to worse in Burma, the report says. The military junta uses a pervasive internal security apparatus to monitor the activities of all religious organizations. Religious minorities have been subjected to violence.

NORTH KOREA

USCIRF found that there are "virtually no personal freedoms in North Korea and no protections for universal human rights." Those discovered engaging in clandestine religious activity, the report found, have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured and sometimes executed.

"Religious belief of any kind is viewed by the government as a potential competitor to the forcefully propagated cult of personality centered on Kim Jong Il and his late father, Kim Il Sung," according to Cromartie.

VIETNAM

The government of Vietnam, the report says, continues to harass, detain, imprison and discriminate against leaders and practitioners of all religious communities.

Although the Vietnamese government, in response to its designation as a CPC, has released a number of prominent religious prisoners, reopened some churches and officially outlawed forced renunciations of faith, serious abuses continue.

Among those most targeted, according to the report, are Montagnard and Hmong Protestants, Vietnamese Menonites, followers of Hoa Hao Buddhism and leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

INDONESIA STAYS ON THE "WATCH LIST"

The USCIRF study found that the religious freedom has increased somewhat in Indonesia since 2002. But the commission remains concerned about "ongoing sectarian violence and the Indonesian government's inability or unwillingness to hold those responsible to account," according to Cromartie.

The commission cited as troubling the forcible closures of worship buildings belonging to religious minorities and the growing political power and influence of religious extremists, who harass and sometimes instigate violence against moderate Muslim leaders and members of religious minorities. In the past year, a Hindu temple

was bombed in Central Sulawesi and mobs attacked an Ahmadiyah compound in West Java several times.

U.S. REVISED PROPOSED RULE ON AIRLINES MIGHT DELAY EU DEAL

Transportation Department's changes seek to address congressional concern

Washington -- Under pressure from lawmakers, U.S. transportation regulators have revised a proposed rule on airline investment in a move likely to delay an open skies deal with the European Union (EU).

The original proposed rule would have allowed foreign investors to enter into deals with U.S. airlines, giving them power to make operational decisions concerning, for example, rates and the routes a carrier serves.

That rule was accepted by EU negotiators as a compromise that opened the way to reaching agreement with the United States on the text of the long-sought pact to liberalize trans-Atlantic air services, according to U.S. officials.

The EU has made formal approval of the November 2005 agreement conditional on adoption of the investment rule, they said.

The revised proposal issued May 3 by the Transportation Department would make clear that U.S. citizens who hold voting stock in an airline or who sit on its board retain veto power over any decision made by non-U.S. stockholders or their representatives, according to a department news release.

In addition, the revised rule would strengthen a requirement that U.S. citizens have full control over all policies and decisions relating to safety, security and national defense.

The department is allowing the public 60 days to review and comment on the revised proposal.

The proposal is designed to make it easier for financially struggling U.S. airlines to raise money and form strategic partnerships and alliances with foreign carriers, the department said.

Some members of Congress have expressed concern that increasing the power of foreign nationals to influence U.S. airlines' managerial decisions could pose a risk to national defense and security and moved to block the department from adopting and implementing the rule as originally proposed.

In April, Transportation Under Secretary Jeff Shane said the department was considering delaying the final rule in response to congressional concerns.

Any such delay might influence the timing of a decision by EU transport ministers on the U.S.-EU open skies agreement, he said.

Shane suggested that the EU ministers "might wish to postpone" until October their consideration of the open skies pact that was originally scheduled for June.

U.S. RESEARCHERS AID EGYPT IN IDENTIFYING HUMAN BIRD FLU CASES

United States naval research facility key link in global disease surveillance

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Egyptian health officials report another laboratory-confirmed case of avian influenza in a human, the nation's 13th case of the disease that originated in birds.

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirms the case in a May 4 statement, saying the patient is hospitalized and in stable condition after being treated for pneumonia brought on by the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus that has caused 113 deaths worldwide.

Egypt's first human case occurred in March after the first appearance of the disease in poultry in February.

As the disease has spread through about two-thirds of the country's governorates, the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit Number 3 (NAMRU-3) has worked with Egyptian health officials to confirm and validate the identification of the flu virus that could become the trigger for an global influenza pandemic with the potential to take millions of lives.

CONFIRMING DIAGNOSIS

As a collaborating center with WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean region, NAMRU has verified all the work of Egyptian laboratories since the arrival of bird flu.

“The laboratory wanted to be extra sure,” of its finding of H5N1, said Major Samuel L. Yingst, a veterinarian and the deputy head of the virology and zoonotic disease program at the NAMRU labs in Cairo, Egypt.

NAMRU also has been the confirming laboratory in animal cases that have occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Jordan and Ukraine.

Virtually all cases of this animal disease that have occurred in humans have been a result of direct contact with birds. Opportunities for that to happen are greatest in cultures where animals and people live in close proximity, and chickens and ducks share the yard with their human owners.

Egypt is one of those cultures. So when animal cases were confirmed, it seemed apparent that human cases soon would follow.

“The Ministry of Health anticipated that there could be a problem [the disease] in humans,” said Dr. Kenneth Earhart, a commander in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Navy and the executive officer at NAMRU.

“When clinical cases presented, they were prepared to begin evaluating and making that diagnosis,” he said in a recent telephone interview with the Washington File from his Cairo office.

In each case, NAMRU labs affirmed the initial findings of the Egyptian medical professionals, and the cases then were counted in the official situation reports maintained by WHO.

IMPROVING DIAGNOSTICS; DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

The United States is working with the international community to prevent the emergence of a global influenza pandemic by helping improve health care infrastructure in vulnerable countries.

To achieve that end, U.S. policy is supporting other nations in developing diagnostics and laboratory capacity

and supporting the work of international health organizations in their programs to detect and contain the disease.

NAMRU-3, a key entity in pursuit of those goals, was established in Cairo 60 years ago with a mission to conduct infectious disease research and disease surveillance to enhance the health of U.S. Defense Department personnel who could be deployed in the region.

“We’ll partner with the ministry of a respective country,” said Earhart. “Together we’ll study [a targeted disease or diseases] in that country, and we’ll help them to [develop] the capacity to diagnose the diseases themselves.”

Intestinal and viral diseases are frequent targets for study, but recently greater attention has been focused on respiratory diseases, specifically influenza.

The goal is to develop local capability to diagnose and identify viruses, Earhart said, so countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region will contribute to the global influenza surveillance network, which strives to identify the prevalent flu strains each year to direct development of effective vaccines.

Achieving that goal requires training, and Earhart said NAMRU-3 specialists are traveling to national labs in the region to provide coaching in laboratory techniques, and other governments are sending their specialists to the Cairo facility.

“There’s been really no week free without trainees here for the last six months,” Earhart said.

NAMRU-3 is also conducting research and surveillance to monitor and understand better viral diseases such as HIV, meningitis, encephalitis and hepatitis.

The U.S.-backed lab in Cairo also contributes to increasing public health awareness in the region, with development and distribution of publications and programs, notably an HIV/AIDS program in Afghanistan, and bird flu awareness in Egypt.

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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